SOUND AND CREATION

What is sound? Modern science defines it as vibration. Atomic science and Einstein's theory have projected the conclusion that, at the level of the atom, all matter is the same — (the Advaita of the Vedanta). But objects appear differently to the eyes because energy produces vibrations of different frequencies at various points.

Vibration creates sound. Conversely stated, if sound is to result, vibrations should be created. Since vibrations of different frequencies occur in the flood-stream of energy, the scientific explanation for the creation of the world and the Vedic pronouncement that creation resulted from the life-breath of the Paramaatma, are mutually in agreement.

What is at the base of the health and feelings in man and beast? Breath and breathing. The passage of breath through the various *Naadis* (pulses- nerve centres) creates vibrations which are responsible for the health of beings; or lack of it. If through Yogic practices, the passage of breath through these centres is controlled or regulated, wonderful health results. In such a state, even if the blood vessels are severed, blood would not flow out. Yogis are able to stop the heart-beat and pulse beat and remain buried underground in a state of quiescence. The venom of a snake or a scorpion bite leaves them unaffected. All this is possible because they are able to discipline the vibrations caused by normal breathing.

Breathing is not only necessary for keeping the body alive but the mind and mental health also depend on it to a great extent. This is because the mind which is the cause of all thought processes and breathing which is the cause of the life force are one and the same. The vibrations of the pulses or nerve centres are responsible for healthy (good) or unhealthy (bad) thoughts. You might have experienced it yourself. How does breathing behave in places where God's presence is palpable or in the presence of a holy man when the mind is peaceful? How is it when it is under the pressure of passion or anger? It will be found that the breathing pattern is widely different in each case. Even in the case of various states of joy and happiness, there is a difference in the breath pattern.

Happiness arising as a result of religious practices or Bhajan is different from that caused by satisfaction of desires of the senses or Indriyas. Generally, the higher type of happiness results in exhalation through the right nostril. Mere sensory pleasure activates breathing out through the left nostril. All sensations are synthesised when thought is centred round a noble purpose. Then, breathing becomes slow, regular and equal through both nostrils. When thought merges or unifies with the object of thinking, breathing totally stops and the mind also stops thinking but life will continue to be sustained. And the superconsciousness or Jnana fills one's being. Therefore, the corporeal body of the Jeeva and the sense of awareness (consciousness) are created by the energy created by breathing and thrive on it or conversely get destroyed when breathing stops. This breathing is nothing but the regulation of the vibrations within us.

All matter, whether animate or inanimate, emanates from the Paramaatma and multiply themselves and manifest in various forms and also get transformed or disappear. The different

vibrations necessary for such mutations should naturally be caused in the substance called "Paramaatma".

Let us leave alone for the present the Advaitic theory that Brahman is without attributes, unchangeable, immutable, static, etc. Even according to Advaita philosophy, in conjunction with the indefinable, indescribable *(Anirvachaneeya)* illusory force *(maaya)* the Brahman manifests itself as the various objects of phenomenal existence. Whether it appears to exist or otherwise, it has to be conceded that the same Primal Force appears differently as the inanimate world and the animate beings. Even if called illusion *(Maaya).* it has to subsist on a base *(Maayin)* which is none other than *Iswara.* Therefore, even *Maaya,* in its various forms, is manifest as vibrations in the *Para Brahma*n). Notwithstanding such vibrations which are manifest, the *ParaBrahman* is not in a state of vibration and deep inside it stays in a state of quiescence. Nevertheless, to our sense-perception, the vibrations are manifest. These cannot be chaotic. From the orbiting of the myriad solar systems down to the creation of a small blade of grass or mosquito, there is an orderly behavioural pattern, a governing law.

The well-being of the world is possible only by the operation of this good law of governance. The natural forces have been harnessed by the Paramaatma for the creation and governance of the world. But it would sometimes appear that God looks on when orderly existence gets slightly out of hand or awry. Thus, we sometimes see the forces of nature stepping out of bounds. The rains do not come in season. Or, there are floods or some other natural calamity. In the matter of departure from the normal, nothing can go as far wrong as the human mind. The lure of the flesh is great. Although by and large, there exist in nature very definite rules of conduct, order and discipline, the mind discards all the bonds of discipline and restraint and strays far and wide like a mad creature. The question arises whether it is possible to correct the forces of nature when they act counter to the well-being of men. Similarly, is there any method to control the mind when it runs amuck?

If the origin of phenomenal existence is traceable to vibrations and sound, then it stands to reason that the same vibrations and sound can correct the erring forces of nature and cleanse the mind of improper thoughts. The Vedas are merely such vibrations and sounds.

It is possible for controlled breathing through Yoga to establish rapport with the Cosmic Breath and perform beneficial acts for general, as well as individual well being. The vibrations of the pulses and nerve centres are not audible to the human ear. This view is now being accepted by many.

Thinking on these lines, science is no enemy to the true concept of religion. On the other hand, it can go a long way to help the impact of religion on society. A century ago, before the advent of the telephone and radio, we would have found it difficult to satisfy the doubts of those lacking in faith as to the credibility of the sonic effects of the Vedas and breathing. Now, these discoveries lend us full support.

The capability of the insentient radio receiver can well be acquired by sentient beings. Nay, we can do even better. *Tapas* or penance is what gives such ability. *Tapas* is to focus the mind and mind force constantly on an objective, discarding the comforts of hearth and home, heedless to the demands of hunger and thirst, sleep and rest. In all this exercise, it is necessary to eschew the awareness that 'I am taking all this trouble and making all the effort and, therefore, I am bound to arrive at the Truth.' Humility should permeate through all the effort in the belief that,

notwithstanding all human endeavour, the grace of God is a vital ingredient to the success of any mission. The Rishis did such penance and reached the summit of yogic capabilities.

The Rishis became aware of all the vibrations that resulted in the creation of the world, that is to say, of the cosmic breathing, as it were. Not only that. Just as electromagnetic waves are converted into sonic sound waves, cosmic vibrations became audible to their ears. These they gave to the world as Veda mantras.

One thing strikes me. The Vedas are called 'Sruti' or that which is heard. The ear is called *Srotra* in Sanskrit. Without being recorded in writing, the Vedas have been passed from one generation to another in the ancient method of learning by the ear in the Guru-Sishya (Master-disciple) tradition. Therefore some say that the appellation *"sruti"* is no doubt based on this. Why was the Veda not written down so that it could be read and learnt? One reason was that some sounds do not lend themselves to be accurately reproduced phonetically. They fall in between two syllables and there are many such sounds in the Vedas. These can only be transmitted orally. In addition, the Veda mantras have to be recited in a certain specified cadence or rhythm (to produce the necessary vibrations). Some sounds have to be in high chromatic scale, some in the medium and others in low scales. However much these may be aided by remarks in asterisk, errors including those of calligraphy, might lead to improper accent, intonation and pronunciation. This will lead to lessening of their intended effect. It is easy to imagine the effect on us of a sound produced in a high or low pitch and that of another sound in the same pattern. Our emotional response and even the cosmic forces which regulate the orderliness of nature will change with the differences in intonation.

But the real reason for calling the Vedas *'Sruti'* is that sounds that are inaudible to ordinary men were indeed heard by the Rishis, and these were then passed on by them to the disciples as they were heard by them. Thus, the Vedic sounds were revealed to the Rishis when they were properly attuned to receive them through their *Tapas.* Hence the Vedas came to be known as ‘Sruti’ or that which was heard.

Earlier I said the Rishis were called Mantra Drashtas, or Seers of the Mantras. The phrase 'Mantra Drashta' might well be construed to mean that the mantras were seen by them in the sky in clusters. Which of these is right? Did they see them or hear them? If they saw them, then, in what language and script were they written, because these date back to an age when the Devanagari and Grantha scripts and the Braahmi script from which these two are the descendants were not extant. Even so, the Vedic texts cannot be accurately reproduced phonetically. The answer to this confusion is this. Whether one says that they 'saw' or 'heard', in reality, the Rishis cognised the mantras within themselves whilst in a high state of Dhyaana. In other words, there was a flash of understanding and inner perception of the mantras. At the level of highest concentration in which they were, the eyes might not have seen or the ears heard in a physical sense. Nevertheless, deep inside them, the sounds of Vedas were felt and they left their impact. The word 'seeing' does not necessarily describe the function of the organ of sight. The expression can well describe the effect created by external objects on any of the sense organs. When it is said that so and so saw the ups and downs in life, it does not mean that his life's joys and sorrows were only visual. It means that he experienced the ups and downs in life. The word Mantra Drishta, or seer, therefore should be taken to refer to the spiritual experience of the Rishis.

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RESEARCH ON THE VEDAS

Another approach to fixing the age of the Vedas is through the language used. The chief constituents of language are style and script. All the scripts which are today in evidence in India owe their origin to the Braahmi script. Today, it looks on a superficial comparison that there could be no connection between, say, the Tamil script and the Devanagari script. But calligraphists have prepared a chart showing the changes that have taken place in the original Braahmi script every hundred years. This reveals that changes have taken place in various regions at various times and, although, today, it looks as though there is no common link at all, the scripts of the various languages appear to have originated from a common script. I used to think, in a lighter vein, that the modern scripts look like the original with moustaches. It is possible to understand the changes which have occurred from time to time from an examination of edicts and proclamations of ancient kings carved in stone and engraved on metal. Thus, the script is helpful in determining the age of an edict.

But in so far as the Vedas are concerned, these were nowhere engraved in stone. The question of the script determining the time does not therefore arise. The only other method left is the examination of the style.

Here again, the image created by words a n d the impact of sound| on understanding have also changed from time to time. Many Tamil words current at the golden age of Tamil literature a r e today unrecognisable. So is the case with other languages. Some sounds have not only become eroded with age but the meaning has also changed.

Vedas are not as easily understandable as the later day literature. Such shift is noticed in all languages. For example, the Anglo-Saxon language - old English - which is under 1000 years old - cannot be easily understood by the modern generation of Englishmen. In America, English has changed its form within the last 300 years to such an extent that, today, it goes under the changed name of American English.

Researchers have calculated the rate at which erosion takes place in the sound of words as a result of usage. It has not been possible to determine, with equal accuracy, the time it takes for the meaning of words to change. Therefore, the age of the Vedas has been determined by these researchers solely on the evidence offered by the changes in the sound of words used in the Vedas. According to them it takes roughly about 200 years for a sound to change noticeably. Going back to the Vedas, from words not in use, it is possible according to them to arrive at the number of changes or mutations that must have taken place. Thus, if ten changes have taken place, then it means the word is 2000 years old. If a word in the Vedas had changed 30 times, the age of the Vedas can at best be 4000 B.C. That is, the Vedas could not have existed earlier than that and soon. This theory is fundamentally incorrect. Words in daily usage undergo changes in sound (pronunciation) and also get corroded in meaning. Although the Vedas may be chanted every day, the beauty is that the purity of the original sound is kept intact unchanged without any erosion. Great care has been taken to safeguard the original form of every .word in the Vedas. Therefore, the Vedic sounds did not suffer any mutations as words in everyday use did, as assumed by these researchers.

According to these scholars, amongst the Vedas, the Rig came first; then the Yajus, then the Saama and lastly the Atharva Veda and in every Veda, the *'Samhithas'* are the first part; the *Braahmanaas* next and the *Aaranyakaas* last. So arguing, the researchers calculate the age of the Vedas. They compare the mutations in words from the Vedas to Valmiki's Ramayana, then to Mahabharata and then to Kalidasa's works.

However much they may examine evidences, none of these can be of any avail as they ignore the basic premises. Even assuming that Vedic words could change, in spite of rigid safeguards, such changes cannot happen in a short span of 200 years. It would take thousands of years for even a small change to take place. If it is conceded that the wear and tear of words in use in literature as well as in the spoken language does not apply to Vedic words, it will be understood that the calculation on the age of the Vedas is incorrect.

The establishment of a separate language called Hindi occurred only a few centuries ago. Even so, it has spread over a large area. It has also undergone many changes during its short life, because it has accepted within its fold words from many languages such as Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian, English and so on. Although Sanskrit had spread (even more than Hindi) all over the country it was not a spoken language and hence did not change. When that is the case with its literature, it would indeed be rare for any changes in Vedic words, whose purity was zealously guarded. Therefore, on the basis of the calculation of the researchers, changes that would take a thousand years to occur in the case of an ordinary language would perhaps take over a hundred thousand years in the case of the Vedas.

The reason why the Vedic sounds have been maintained in their pristine purity is because, only by the correct intonation of words, would the mantras attain their power. Lest any mistake should creep in, a separate dedicated section of the community had made it its business to hand it down safely from one generation to the next, unsullied and in its original form. Research cannot find out what exactly happened, unless this basic fact is recognised. The various methods of chanting bear testimony to the success with which the purity of the sounds have been guarded.

ERROR-FREE METHODS OF CHANTING

Without resort to writing, our forefathers had devised many ways to prevent even a small error to creep into the Vedas. The fullest benefit from the Vedic mantras can result only if no word is changed; no unauthorised upward or downward drift in the note occurs in recitation. Hence the numerous safeguards.

How much time should it take to utter each word is indicated by resort to the notation by maatras - (the time it takes to pronounce a short vowel). How to regulate breathing so that the vibrations can occur at what part of the body to give birth to the pure word sound is also laid down in the *Vedanga* called *Seeksha*. .

A fool-proof method used is to chant each mantra in various patterns and combinations known as *Vaakya, Pada, Krama, Jata, Maala, Sikha, Rekha, Dhwaja, Danda, Ratha, Ghana,* etc. Some learned pandits are called *"Ghanapaatis".* This means that they are learned in the Vedas to the extent of chanting of Vedas in the pattern called *Ghanam.* When we listen to a *Ghanapaati* reciting Vedas in *Ghana* form, we note that he repeats the words in various ways back and forth and in different

patterns. This would be pleasant to the ears and creates a sense of happinessl within. It would seem that the natural grandeur of the Veda mantras is heightened, as it were. So would be the effect of recitation in the other prescribed patterns of *Kramam, Jata, Sikha, Maala,* etc. But the main object of reciting them is to make no mistake in the original meaning and sound pattern of the words *Vaakya Paatha* or *Samhita Paatha* is to recite the mantras in a sentence straight. When mantras come in sentences, some of the words therein have to be conjoined in chanting. To recite the Veda mantras, *pada* by *pada* or word by word, instead of joining the words and stringing them together, is *Pada Paatha.*

Pada Paatha occurs after *Samhita Paatha.* In *Pada Paatha* the sentence is broken down to 'words' or *pada.* This gives the student of the Vedas the knowledge of each word in a sentence. Next is *Krama Paatha*. In this method, the first word of a mantra is added to the second, the second to the third, the third to the fourth and so on, until the whole sentence of the mantra is completed. This *paatha* or method of recitation helps the student understand not only the individual words but also how two words can be combined in recitation and what modification occurs in swara in such a combination.

In certain ancient edicts, notably gift deeds, at the end of the Names of some illustrious persons, there would be a suffix *'Krama* Vit . Like 'Vedavit', "Krama Vit" means that a person is Well versed in reciting the Vedas by the *Krama Paatha* method. There are many such edicts found in South India.

The *Ghana Pkatha* is more difficult than the above. There are five more types. They all are different ways of chanting by changing the order of words by various permutations and combinations. The combination of words will be 1-2-2-1-1-2-3-3-2-1-1-2-3; 2-3-3-2-2- 3-4-4,3-2-2-4 and so on in the *Ghana* form. Just as in a laboratory, a life giving elixir is preserved with the utmost care, the Veda mantras, which are for universal benefit, have been preserved by the ancients, without suffering erosion or corrosion even a bit and without resort to writing by such methods of recitation. It must be remembered that, while chanting words backwards and forwards, the *swaras* of each have to be properly preserved and the student learns how the combination of words affects the *swaras.* The *Samhita Paatha* and *Pada Paatha* are called *Prakriti* (or natural) *Paatha,* as the words of the mantra occur in normal sequence. The rest are called *Vikriti* (or artificial or not natural). In *Krama,* although the words do not occur in the natural order of one, two and three, since they do not revert like one after two and two after three, it cannot be called fully *Vikriti* or artificial. The *Vikritis* are eight in number:

Jataa maalaa sikha rekha dhwajo dando Rat ho ghanah
Ityashta vikrtayah proktah kramapoorvaa maharshibhih

The above system of complicated recitations was devised in very early times in order to preserve the purity of the word, sound; intonation, pronunciation, accent and sound combinations of the Vedas. By repeating the words in manifold ways, the correct tally of words also was kept which has naturally ensured its purity. To enable the scholars to take up the difficult methods of recitation, it was even laid down that the more difficult methods of chanting earned the chanter more punya or merit.

Since the ancients had taken so much pains to keep the form of the Veda mantras safe and pure the method of the modern researchers to measure in terms of time the changes m the sound of Veda mantras is unrealistic and cannot help to understand the truth.

GOD'S WORDS

It is not correct to dispute that the Vedas are a revelation. Not only in our country but those belonging to other religions also do believe that their sacred texts are but a revelation. Jesus said that his preachings were not his own, but those of God which he only propagated. Mohammedans say that Mohammed merely preached the instructions of Allah which were revealed to him. Our theory of revelation is repeated by them too as "Revealed Texts". God's words have become available to us through saints. Thus in all religions, God's words have been revealed to great seers, prophets and Rishis who have made them available to mankind for its betterment. A person who delves deep, with a single-minded purpose, into any field, is bound to discover the truth. This is called the flash of understanding or intuition.

VEDAS ARE WITHOUT END

If the whole of creation and all that is before and beyond creation is involved in the world of vibrations, it must indeed be colossal in magnitude. That being so, the question arises as to how all of the manifold universal activities are encompassed within the Veda mantras.

It has to be understood that the Vedas are vast and what has come to us as Vedas is limited in extent. What is stated in the Vedas is that they are verily endless - *"ananta vai Vedah"* . It cannot be said that the Vedas in their entirety got revealed to the Rishis. Only a portion — a small portion of the limitless Vedas — became revealed to them. The four Vedas and a thousand and odd Veda *saakhaas* (or branches) of the Vedas are only a portion of what was made known to them.

The breath of the Paramaatma, whose resonance inspired Brahma to undertake creation, still exists in space in spite of all destructive deluges which have happened from time to time even after many Brahmas. This has no decay or death. Every Brahma who comes after the Great Deluge or Pralaya undertakes creation with the help of these vibrations of the Veda mantras or primordial sound. Their origin is vibratory movement. This movement was captured by Brahma as Vedas and, on chanting them, creation became manifest.

It is said that if certain sound vibrations are released near plants, these induce faster growth and higher yield. Similarly some vibrations retard growth. That sound vibrations are capable of creation, preservation and destruction, is thus clearly proved even in such ordinary matters as the growth of plants.

Brahma was able to create the whole Universe with the aid of Vedic sounds by his *Tapas* or power of meditation. How does it happen that a saintly person is able to cure a disease by chanting

only once the *Panchaakshara* mantra (five syllable word) which we chant daily? Obviously because he has greater power of concentration and power of invoking the vibrations in the proper manner. In addition, the mantra should be chanted in its purity without any change of words or tone. Only then can result be obtained. Since Brahma manifested Himself from the Paramaatma solely for the purpose of creation, his mastery of the Vedas was total.

With the aid of electricity which gets released from the empty skies, a great many things are nowadays performed or achieved. Likewise all creation emanates from the attributeless Brahman which is all consciousness. During the deluges, the consciousness is quiescent. When a wrestler sleeps, his strength remains unfelt. It is only when he is wrestling or indulging in some such activity that his power is known. Similarly, during creation, the cosmic force performs a number of jobs. From out of the quiescent being, a force is released to do such jobs. Brahma came out of such a force. Since he was born in the form of *Tapas,* he was able to Absorb all the Vedas with their full vigour. He created the universe with the help of Vedic resonances. The Vedas are limitless, as creation is also varied and manifold.

When Brahma took form, all the Vedic sounds were born in his Heart, his inner self. Thus, we see the limitlessness of the Vedas. The codification into four Vedas and the thousand and odd *saakhas* is something that came much later. Mantras are, therefore, revelations to the Rishis who performed deep *Tapas.* They are the Rishis to whom the mantras are said to belong. They have the divine ear to hear those mantras. *Yoga Saastra* says that, if the spatial expanse in the skies and the space which exists in a microform in the mind are unified, all the suspended sounds in space will become audible to us. Those who feel in unison with all objects in creation can alone feel the sound. Thus, the Rishis brought forth the mantras for the benefit of the world and did not create them. Even so, they have rendered a great service to mankind by bringing to its ken what was already in existence but not known.

We make obeisance to a person who brings us the Ganga water. Did he produce the Ganga water? He only brought it to us. Nevertheless, we thank him for bringing it to us from a long distance. Similarly no praise is too high for the Rishis who have vouchsafed to us the mantras which were beyond our grasp.

YOGA MANTRA AND MANTRA SIDDHI

All the fourteen worlds are a kingdom. This kingdom is ruled by an emperor. All the created beings are His subjects. The emperor and the subjects have no beginning in time If there is a kingdom and there is an emperor, there must be a set of laws. Since all the three are without beginning, the laws are also without a beginning. This law without a beginning is the Veda. Although the kingdom is without a beginning, from time to time it has a temporary end after which it reappears in creation. But the Paramaatma, who is the emperor, and the Veda which is the law are truly without a beginning and without an end.

The phenomenal world that we know of is created; it grows and then is lost in the deluge after a few million years. Again it is created. Thus, it goes on. However, the emperor and the law remain

stable At the start of each creation, the emperor creates authorities-in-charge. He infuses them with the necessary powers so that they can perform their assignment.
As I said earlier, the *Yoga Saastra* says that there is a link between one's ear and the spatial expanse of the universe. If this is established, one obtains 'divine ears', so to say. With the aid of these divine ears, those in authority were able to cognise the sound waves which are diffused in the sky from time immemorial, by the grace of the Paramaatma. They thus became the first to know the Vedas. They are the *maharishis* to whom mantras belong.

We hear as well as utter different sounds. By the vibration of each nerve centre, a certain emotion is created in the mind. Some create passions, some laziness, and some others unhappiness. Putting it differently, when one is in a passion, a certain nerve vibration occurs and similarly when one is in anger.

Thus with every kind of emotion, a different set of vibrations are caused to the nerve centres. . These are evident from our actual experience. Mental peace produces a certain calmness which is reflected in the face. This is because certain nadis get cool and composed. Thus Raja Yoga, which is one of the paths leading to realization uses breath control (pranayama) as the chief instrument in the control of the mind. Similarly, Mantra Yoga is another path. When we utter a word, the life breath is allowed to pass though the gaps in the throat, tongue, lips - upper or lower - mouth, etc. Only then the sound of the word emanates and becomes audible. Vibrations are caused to the nerve centres situated in these areas through which breath passes to produce the sound of the word. Veda mantras properly recited with the proper discipline produce the necessary emotions in the mind which ensure well-being to the person reciting as well as to the world. Other baser emotions are also kept out in the process.

By definition, mantra means that by which one repeatedly meditates upon and through which one is saved. It is the duty of a brahmin to chant the mantras repeatedly so that the necessary vibrations are created again and again, resulting in his own well-being and, through the power so created, cause the general well-being of the world.

If one is to succeed with the mantras and get the fullest benefit from them, there is a prescribed method for chanting them. Learned people consider six methods of recitation that are not correct and advise that they be avoided.

Geetee is one who chants in a sing-song fashion. This is not correct. Though Samaveda is musically recited, it can be recited only in the approved musical way and not as one pleases. Further, since the sound and its variations have potency, recitation other than in the proper swara is not only not proper but harmful. It should be recited only in the prescribed mode *Seeghree* is one who chants in a quick tempo and ends the recitation quickly. This is also wrong. The Vedic words should be intoned by closely adhering to the time limits prescribed for uttering each word-sound if full benefits are to result. Si*rahkampeem* is one who shakes and nods his head needlessly while chanting.

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THE POWER OF THE VEDAS

The main characteristics of the Vedas as mentioned already are: (1) They are without a beginning *(anaadi),* (2) they have no human authorship *(apourusheya),* and (3) they are at the root of all

creation. But this is not all. The sound while chanting them activates our nerve centres and also affects the atmosphere, resulting in individual as well as collective well-being of the world. Collective well-being does not refer only to humanity. No other religious text emphasises the well-being of animals and plants as much as the Vedas. "Not only two-legged but four legged beings should prosper" says the Veda. It goes even further and stresses the well-being of shrubs, trees, mountains and rivers — in fact all creation.

The Vedic texts contain a wealth of meaning. Besides its poetic grandeur they contain detailed injunctions for a well-ordered society and social life, great philosophical truth and even scientific laws. It is not necessary for the Veda mantras, which are essentially vibrations of sound, to have a verbal meaning as we commonly understand it.

In every day life, we find the Raga *Aaalapana,* or the detailed delineation of musical notes or Ragas which contain no words but only a symbolic meaning nevertheless capable of producing emotions of joy and sorrow. Experiments have shown that the yield of vegetables has been increased by instrumental music. This shows that sound has a creative ability. That apart, the most important thing to note is that, since the sounds emanate from a musical instrument, there is no question of any words or meaning being essential for effectiveness. The very musical sound itself has an effect.

The outstanding feature of the Vedas, therefore, lies in the fact that the sound of the mantras by itself when chanted, has a meaning, apart from the words which are also full of meaning. Thus, the greatness of the Vedas lies in the mantras having properties of sound and meaning. A pill may be bitter but may be good for health. A sweet may taste well but may cause harm. How nice it would be to have something that would not only taste well but also improve health like a sweet tonic? Veda mantras have this two-fold advantage.

Vedas contain injunctions for ensuring the well-being in this world and the world to come. It guides the actions of a person from the moment of birth to the moment he breathes his last and thereafter to ensure his salvation. It does not stop at individual salvation. How should society behave, what are the duties of the common man, how should a brahmin conduct himself, how should the king govern the country, what should be the conduct of women — all these matters have been presented to us in a codified form in the Vedas.

THE FOUR VEDAS

Ananthavai Vedhaah" - Endless are theVedas", but the Rishis have been able to capture for us only some mantras out of the vast limitless Vedas. These are sufficient for our happiness here and salvation hereinafter as well as for universal welfare Although we refer to the Vedas as four in number, there are different versions and differing methods of recitation of these four. These are called *paataantharam* or way of recitation. Each school of recitation or recension is called a "saakha", meaning branch. Each of these is a branch of the Vedic tree. The Veda stands in majesty like a banyan tree with innumerable main and subsidiary branches. Even though it has innumerable branches, they have been classified and grouped as belonging to the main branches viz. the Rig, Yajus, Saama and Atharva which are called Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, etc, because of their importance as a group.

Although modern research assigns to Rig Veda a date earlier than Yajur Veda, according to our Saastras, and our beliefs, they are all without beginning in time. No credence can be placed on the findings of researchers that this Veda came first or that came later when we find that, at the beginning of creation, all the four Vedas were available in the universe. Similiarly "researchers" err in deciding the sequence in which the portions of Vedas such as *Samhita, Braahmana,* and *Aaranyaka* are to be placed. Calculations on the time factor in regard to the origin or sequence of the Vedas becomes inappropriate.

The extent of the discovery of the Veda mantras may have varied depending upon the period of transcendental state Rig Veda itself contains references to Yajus and Saama Veda in many places. *Purusha Sookta,* which appears in the tenth *mandala,* ninetieth hymn of Rig Veda, refers to the other Vedas as well. Does this not show that there can be no question of some Vedas being "earlier or later"?

In each *Saakha, there are* three portions called *Samhita, Braahmana* and *Aaranyaka.* This again is a classification. Generally when we speak of Veda *adhyayana,* we mean the recitation of the *Samhita* portion. This is because the *Samhitas* are the foundation or life breath, as it were, of a *saakha. Samhita* means that which has been collected and arranged. It brings out the purport of a Veda in the shape of mantras, systematically arranged.

RIG VEDA

The whole of the Rig Veda Samhita is in the form of verses. What in the later age came to be called *slokas* (stanzas) was earlier known as 'Rik', or a hymn in praise. The whole of the Rig Veda Samhita is only in Rig or hymn form extolling different Devatas. Each Rik is a mantra. A number of Riks constitute a *"Sookta"* .. The Rig Veda - that is the Samhita portion of it - contains more than ten thousand Riks (10,170 to be precise). The Samhitas of all the four contain 20,500 mantras. Rig Veda, which contains 1028 Sooktas or collection of hymns has been divided into two containing 10 *mandalas* and eight *ashtakas.* It begins with a sookta on Agni and also ends with it. Amongst the Vedas, the Rig Veda is wholly in the form of hymns in praise of Devatas. Since in the beginning *(Upakrama)* and end *(UpasambaaraJ* it talks of Agni, some think that the purport of the Veda is fire-worship. It would be more correct if Agni is taken to mean the light of the soul's.consciousness *(Atma chaitanyam)* - the glow of the soul's awakening.

Although the last Sookta of the Rig Veda pertains to Agni, it contains verses of universal appeal: "Let all men meet and think as with one mind. Let all hearts unite in love. Let the goal be common. May all live in happiness with a common purpose," so ends the Rig Veda. The pride of Rig Veda is that it contains hymns in praise of all Devatas. Wise men honour it, for it describes the ways of social living better than others. For example, the marriage rites have been created on the pattern of the marriage of Soorya's daughter, which it details. Dramatic situations like the dialogue between Purooravas and Urvasi also find a place in Rig Veda. In later years poets like Kalidasa have expatiated on these.

Discerning men extol the portions in Rig Veda like those dealing with Ushas, the goddess of dawn, as masterpieces of poetic composition. There must be some reason indeed why Rig Veda has been assigned the first place amongst Vedas. The action which Yajur Veda predicates and the musical recitation which Saama Veda dictates emerge from the basic Riks in theRig Veda.

YAJUR VEDA

The word "yajus" is derived from the root "yaj", which means worship. The word yajna (sacrificial worship) is also derived from it. Just as the word 'Rig' itself means a hymn in praise, so also the word 'Yajus' connotes spelling out the ritualistic procedure of the yajna. True to its name, the chief purpose of Yajur Veda is to give the mantras in Rig Veda appearing in the form of hymns a practical shape in the form of Yagna or worship. Yajur Veda helps in the actual performance of yaynas using these hymns and mantras. In addition to having many branches (saakhas), as in the other Vedas, Yajur Veda has two main branches with numerous recensions in each branch. The main branches are called Sukla Yajur Veda and Krishna Yajur Veda. Sukla means white and Krishna black. The Sukla Yajur Veda Samhita is also known as *Vaajasaneyi Samhita. Vaajasani* Is the Sun. As Rishi Yaajnavalkya is believed to have brought this Samhita to the knowledge of the world after learning it from the Sun God, it is called *Vaajasaneyi Samhita.*

There is an interesting story as to how Yaajnavalkya learnt the Vaajasaneyi Samhita from the sun. When the Vedas were classified by Veda Vyasa into four, Yajur Veda had only one version or branch. This was entrusted by Sage Vyasa to Sage Vaisampaayana for preservation and propagation through disciples. Yaajnavalkya learnt this from Vaisampaayana. Due to a misunderstanding between them, viz., Vaisampaayana and Yaajnavalkya, the teacher asked the pupil to return what he had taught him. Yaajnavalkya saw the justice of this demand and complied accordingly. He then prayed to God Soorya to accept him as a pupil. Soorya taught him the Yajur Veda in a different version. Thus, it gained the name of *Vaajasaneyi* or Sukla Yajur Veda. Since this was called Sukla (or white), the earlier one taught by Vaisampaayana came to be called the Krishna Yajur Veda.

Krishna Yajur Veda is not wholly divided into Samhita and Braahmana portions. The Braahmana portions are at times conjoined with the Samhita mantras in their respective places. The glory of Yajur Veda lies in the good presentations of Vedic Karma or rituals. Yajnas like Darsa Poonamasa, Somayaga, Vaajapeya. Rajasooya, Asvamedha and many others are made known to us in all their procedural detail by the Taittareeya Samhita in Krishna Yajur Veda. In addition, some mantras which are not contained in Rig Veda are found in the Yajur Veda. For example, the Sri Rudram, now in vogue, is from the Yajur Veda. Although five sooktas called "Pancha Rudram" find a place in Rig Veda, today Sri Rudram refers only to that which is contained in Yajur Veda. That is why the great Siva Bhakta, Appayya Dikshita, is stated once to have felt sorry that he was not born in Yajur Veda as he could adequately worship Siva only through Yajur Veda. He was born in a family which traditionally followed the Sama Veda. Today, a vast majority follow the Yajur Veda. While Sukla Yajur Veda is the prevalent school in Northern India, the Krishna Yajur Veda is the prevalent school in South India.

The *Purusha Sookta,* which appears in the Rig Veda, also appears with certain changes in Yajur Veda. But if *Purusha Sooktha* is mentioned by name, as such, it generally refers to the version which appears in Yajur Veda.

Yajur Veda is of special significance to Advaitins - those who understand and believe in the "non-dualism" school of philosophy. Any philosophical doctrine *(Siddhaanta),* according to the learned, should contain a *Sootra* or aphorism, *Bhaashya* or commentary and *Vaartika* or an explanatory note. Sootra is to enunciate the doctrine in a condensed or pithy form. Bhaashya is a detailed commentary thereon. Vaartika is a further elaborate elucidation of the Bhaashya. In Advaita Siddaanta. the word *Vaartikakaara* (one who has written the Vaartika) refers only to one person, viz., Sureswaracharya, a disciple of Adi Sankaracharya. To which Bhaashya did he write a Vaartika? If the Upanishads are regarded as Sootras, Adi Sankaracharya wrote Bhaashya on them . He also wrote a Bhaashya on Brahmasutra, composed by Sage Baadarayana or Veda Vyasa. The direct disciple of the Acharya, Sureswaracharya. wrote the Vaartika on the Upanishad Bhaashya. In doing so he did not take up all the ten major Upanishads for commentary, but only two. These are the Taittareeya Upanishad and the Brahadaaranyaka Upanishad, pertaining to the Krishna Yajur Veda and the Sukla Yajur Veda respectively. Both the Upanishads are of the Yajur Veda. Thus this Veda is of great importance to the followers of Advaita philosophy.

SAAMA VEDA

"Saama" means to bring *"shanti"* or peace to the minds. In other words, to make mind find happiness in peace. Of the four methods of tackling an enemy, viz., *saama, daana, bheda* and *danda,* the first is saama or conquering the enemy by love and conciliatory words. Many of the Riks or mantras in Rig Veda are set to music in melodious hymns in Saama Veda. The mantras are the same as in Rig Veda. But, instead of the *udaatta,* (upward swara) *anudhaatta,* (downward swara), etc., for chanting the Rig Veda Mantra, the Saama has set the mantras to music with lengthened notes. *Saama Gaana* can be said to be the basis and source of the seven Swaras or notes fundamental to Indian music systems. Saama Gaana or singing of hymns as per rules of Sama Veda propitiates all Devatas. In Yajnas, in addition to offering libations, there is a priest called *"udgaata"* who chants Saama Veda, in order to ensure the grace of the Gods.

Although basically they are mantras from Rig Veda, they are set to music which is greatly conducive to the spiritual evolution of the self and the grace of the Gods. This is the special virtue of Saama Veda and so, in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna Bhagavan declares: "Amongst Vedas, I am Saama Veda." In Lalita Sahasranaama, which gives a thousand extolling attributes of Goddess Lalita, the Divine Mother, one of the epithets mentioned is *"Saamagaanapriya"* - meaning one who is pleased by the recital of Saama Veda.

ATHARVA VEDA

Atharva means a purohit .There was a Rishi by that name .The mantras in the Atharva Veda were brought to light by this Rishi, called Atharvan.. This Veda contains many types of mantras designed to ward off evil and hardship and destroy enemies. The Atharva mantras are in prose as well as in

verse. In Atharva Veda are found mantras not mentioned in the other Vedas. Atharva Veda also contains many hymns dealing with creation.

The hymn which extols the wonder of creation called the "Prithvi Sooktam" appears in this Veda. Amongst the ten major Upanishads, the three viz., *Prasna, Mundaka* and Maan*dukya* are part of thisVeda. There is a saying that, for a *Mumukshu* or seeker after truth, *Maandukya Upanishad* alone can ensure Moksha or liberation. The importance of Atharva Veda can be judged from this. Gaayatri, which is regarded as the greatest of all mantras, is said to be the essence of the three Vedas, viz., Rig, Yajur and Saama. Obviously, Atharva Veda has a separate mantra. Therefore, before undertaking the study of Atharva Veda,, it is said that a separate *Upanayanam* or sacred thread ceremony has to be performed and *Brahmopadesa* obtained before a study of Atharva Veda.

The Gaayatri to which boys are initiated during Upanayana is called *Tripaada Gaayatri,* i.e. three legged. It is so called since it has three limbs. Each *Paada* or limb, is the essence of one Veda. Atharva Veda, however, has a Gaayatri of its own. Hence the necessity to get initiated into Atharva Gaayatri- and then learn Atharva Veda. On the other hand, a person belonging to one of the other three Vedas and wishes to learn the other two among the three need not get a second Upanayana performed for himself. That is because there is a common Gaayatri for all the three Vedas, Rig, Yajus and Sama.

There are very few persons who are learned in the *sakhaa* of Atharva in northern India where it was once prevalent. In South India, there are no pure Atharva Vedins at all. Thus, the position of the recitation of the *Sakhaas* of this Veda is indeed pitiable.Even today Atharva Vedins can be found , although in small numbers, in Gujarat, Saurashtra and Nepal.

Although the four Vedas may appear different, in certain observances or precepts, in the mode of recitation, etc., all of them have a common goal, viz., to ensure the well-being of the universe and to help every one towards spiritual progress. A distinguishing feature of the Vedas, is that no Veda says "this is the only way", "this is the only God." All of them say that any good path followed with faith and loyalty and any Devata worshipped in whatever way, will lead one to the true goal. Further, there is no other book of religion in this world which advocates the pursuit of diverse paths. Every religion says that its doctrine alone will lead to heaven. The Vedas alone have such a breadth of vision as to say that the same truth can be realised in many ways by those pursuing diverse routes. This is the greatness of the Vedas.

BRAAHMANA AND AARANYAKA

So far, we have been referring mostly to the Samhita portion of the Veda, when we were talking about the Vedas. The main text of a Veda is its Samhita portion. In addition, each Veda has a part called *Braahmana* and another called *Aaranyaka.* The portion called Braahmana, lists what the Vedic Karmas are (rituals to be performed) and explains how they should be performed. When the mantras contained in a Veda Samhita are converted into action, called yajna, the Braahmanas serve the purpose of a guidebook or handy manual explaining how each word should be understood, or what construction should be placed on each word used, in other words the proper use of the mantra. *'Aaranyaka'* is derived from the word *Aranya'* meaning "forest". However, neither the Samhita nor

the Braahmana advocates that a person should leave the town or village and seek the solitude of the forest .Yajna and other rituals are prescribed only for those who live in homes and lead the life of house-holders. But it has to be understood that Vedic rituals are intended to confer not only material benefits but also mental purity by constant discipline. Having obtained mental purity *(Chiththa Shuddhi),* one must seek the solitude of forests for further concentration and meditation. Chanting of Vedas performance of yajnas and rules of discipline are all meant as preliminaries for the ultimate meditation on the true nature of the self and true nature of reality.

The Aaranyaka portions of the Vedas are meant to explain the inner meaning, the doctrine or philosophy contained in the Samhitas as mantras and in the Braahmanas as Karmas. Aaranyakas enlighten us about the obscure and distant imagery which the Vedas contain. According to Aaranyakas, it is important to understand the reasons why yajnas are required to be done and not merely their actual performance. Modern research is of the view that Aaranyakas are the result of the meditation of sages who sought the solitude of the forests. The Brihadhaaranyaka Upanishad, which is a combination of Aaranyaka and Upanishad, begins with an explanation of the Aswamedha Yajna on such a note of analytical philosophy.

UPANISHADS

Upanishads come towards the end of the Aaranyakas. If the Samhita is likened to a tree, the Braahmanas are its flowers and the Aaranyakas are its fruit in an unripened state. The Upanishads are the ripe fruits. The direct method of realising through' the path of knowledge *(jnaana maarga)* the nonduality *(Abhedha)* of the Supreme Being and the soul are explained in the Upanishads. Although Upanishads contain reference to various disciplines of learning (Vidyas), Yajnas and worship of devatas, etc. essentially, their main theme is a philosophical enquiry and dealing with that state of the mind with all shackles destroyed.

On this basis, the Vedas are generally considered to have two portions, viz., *Karma Kaanda* (portion dealing with action or rituals) and *Jnaana Kaanda* (portion dealing with knowledge). These are also referred to as *Poorva Mimaamsa* and *Uttara Mimaamsa.*

After analysing the Karma Kaanda, Maharshi Jaimini expressed the view that it was the end-product or fruit of Vedic philosophy. His treatise is called *Poorva Mimaamsa.* Similar analysis of the Jnana Kaanda by Sage Veda Vyasa led to the conclusion that it was the quintessence of the Vedas and these he stated in the form of aphorisms - *Brahma Sutra.* Compared to the Karma Kaanda, the Upanishad portion of Jnana Kaanda is very small in extent and is in a condensed form. Whereas Jaimini's Poorva Mimasa Sutras contain 1000 sections, the Brahma Sutra has only 192 sections. Just as a tree has a profusion of leaves but only a relatively small number of flowers and fruits, so also the tree of Veda has many leaves in the form of Karma Kaanda and the Upanishad portions are much fewer like the fruits of a tree. Foreign scholars and philosophers in their intellectual approaches have not delved deep enough to touch the fr*inge of Satyam or* Transcendental Truth. Experimental verification of the conclusion which is reached by the intellect is necessary. The special characteristic of the Upanishads, which other philosophical Systems do not share, is that they contain mantras which translate philosophical thought through the aid of vibrations of the mantras into actual experience. Unlike other philosophies, which are in the nature of intellectual research, the Karma

Kaanda of the Vedas prescribe a way of life which would make it possible for the realisation of its philosophy. If one lived according to its dictates, it would lead to purity of thought, when one could withdraw from worldly activities. If, at this stage, one studied the Upanishads assiduously, it would not be merely a mental exercise but a way of life, a part of one's experience of life, as it were. It is at this summit of philosophical experiencethat the nonduality of the Soul and SupremeBeing (Jiva and Brahma), becomes clearer. It is to reach this stage that a person, who has conditioned his mind by the performance of Karma, has to leave all activities and become a Sanyaasi. At this stage, one gets initiated into what are called, *Mahaavaakyas.* Each of the Vedas has many Mahavaakyas or great sayings.. But four - one from each Veda - are very important, thought-provoking and powerful. These spell out the non-duality of Jiva and Brahman. If these are chanted and one meditates deeply, the non-duality will be actually experienced. These four Mahavakyas are contained in four Upanishads. Although there exist numerous rituals or karmas, varieties of worship and ways of life as propounded in the Samhita and Braahmana portions, when it comes to reaching the end of the journey and realising the ultimate objective, the Upanishads alone are of help.

There is a Mahaavaakya in Aitareya Upanishad of the Rig Veda which says that the exalted actual experience alone is Brahman “Prajnanam Brahma”. “I am Brahman” is another Mahaavaakya from the Brihadhaaranyaka Upanishad of Sukla Yajur Veda. The fourth chapter of the Taittareeya Upanishad contains a slightly different Mahaavaakya “Ahamasmi Bramahamasmi”. There is aMahaavaakya in Chaandogya Upanishad of the Sama Veda in the form of a Guru teaching his disciple to the effect that "that thou art".. The Atma (soul) is Brahma, *Aayamaatma Brahma* is the Mahaavaakya from Maandukya Upanishad of Atharva Veda. Adi Sankaraacharya's terse and pithy advice to spiritual aspirants is contained in *"Sopaana Panchaka",* a string of five verses which outlines the steps to be taken on the ladder of spiritual ascent. He starts by saying, "Study and recite the Vedas; perform the various rituals/acts prescribed therein," and concludes: "Be guided by the Mahaavaakyas, meditate on them constantly and reach the state of Brahman." Thus, it will be seen that the Upanishads contain the ultimate message and purpose of the Vedas. They are, therefore, known as "Vedanta", the word *Anta* meaning "end". Upanishads are the end of the Vedas in two senses. When each (Veda) Saakha is taken, first comes the Samhita, then the Braahmana and then the Aaranyaka, at whose concluding portion comes the Upanishad. The second sense in which it is understood is this: The ultimate goal or aim of the Vedas is contained in the Upanishads. Thus, the Upanishads are the "end" of the Vedas both in the sense of textual presentation and realisation of the end-product.

A temple in a town, a Gopura for the temple, the summit of the Gopura are all in an ascending order of height. Likewise, the Upanishads are the summit and end of Vedas. *"Upa - ni - shada"* means "to sit by the side". What was taught by making the disciple sit by the side of the teacher is the Upanishads. It can also be taken to mean "that which makes you reach the side of or near "Brahmam". Just as *Upanayana* (the sacred thread ceremony) can be taken to mean both ways. viz.. "leading to the Guru" or "leading to the Paramaatma". the Upanishads also permit a dual interpretation. Instructing by keeping close to the disciple implies that the thing taught is in the nature of a secret personal advice. It is not for those who are not mentally conditioned to absorb the teaching. That is why the Upanishads, when propounding subtle truths, says pointedly : This is Upanishad. This is Upanishd." That which is latent in the Vedas is called *Rahasya* or secret. The

Upanishads are such confidential personalised instructions to those fit to receive them. The word Veda means —to know. The Upanishad defines Atma as that by knowing which all things will have become known. The goal of the Vedas is to make known that Atma. Whether it is the Karma which comes in the beginning, or knowledge (jnaana) which comes at the end, i.e. at the start or the beginning and at the conclusion or the end, the central theme is Iswara – Brahman- Atma all of which ultimately, mean the same.

Karma is divided into different types, and jnaana exists unitarily but the central subject matter in both is the same. The sense organs have been created in such a way that they cannot see the Atma but can only see thing and reach outwardly. When a person allows his attention to drift from the thing inhand to something outside, he is said to be looking elsewhere. *Atma* alone is the real matter in hand.

Only after learning, analysing and weighing other outward things, the intellect which is capable of grasping everything can reach "That" by knowing which all things will have become known. Only for this purpose, the Vedas talk of so many disciplines, observances, karmas, arts and social duties. The attachment to the physical body should become progressively weak by the continued performance of karmas. The mind and intellect should get dissolved, as it were, by cognition, searching examination of truths and practice of self-discipline. Attachment to the body increases by impure acts. These lead to the unsteadiness of the mind. On the other hand, the performance of Vedic karmas and observance of Vedic injunctions, which are based on mantras and which are designed to bring universal well-being, bring about a certain relaxation in the tempo of the activities of the body and mind. In the end, it leads to maturity and ripeness to be able to see inwards. After this seeing, a person gets supreme bliss, *Moksha Aananda,* here itself. Moksha means "the state of being released" - 'freedom' from the worldly involvements. If the body and the mind can release themselves from the sense of ego, it also spells release from Samsaara. The aim of t h e V e d a s is to help one obtain Moksha whilst in this world i t s e l f.

Therefore, make the great "Iatvam' or the truth flash through you. Beginning with *karma-anushtaana,i.e.* performance of prescribed duties, eg. yajna and worship of deities, etc., and ending with deep meditation on the purport of the 'Mahaa Vaakya, all these practices are for this purpose alone. The social structure which the Veda lays down, rules of conduct for householders, laws of Government, art, medicine, geology and other disciplines, are the steps that lead to self-realisation *(Aatma-sakshaatkaara).* The convergence of 'tat' (that) and 'tvam' (you) will in the beginning be felt for a second like the flash of lightning. It is this stage which is referred to in Kenopanishad (4.4) that the consciousness of Brahman will be like a lightning inside a lightning, and felt only for a fraction of a second. If the practices are continued, then, like a waterfall producing electricity continuously, one can stay at that level of consciousness. This is Moksha - liberation whilst alive. After death, that consciousness mingles or merges with the Supreme Being. Even this distinction between liberation whilst living and liberation after death is felt by others but the jnaani regards both as the same.

Thus, the supreme purport of all the Vedas is to make us realise by our own experience that all is Brahman and thus lead us to a state of bliss.

In today's state of affairs, what is our duty? We have to see that the eight Samhitas which alone are now available out of the 1180 Veda Saakhas do not perish and do not become unavailable to the

next generation. It will be an unpardonable sin if we do not take immediate and adequate steps to preserve for posterity the few Veda Saakhas and Upanishads.